



Abraham Lincoln.  
*His Task and His Endowment.*

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—•••••—Speech by Hon. Wm. H. Collins.—•••••—

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# Abraham Lincoln.

## His Task and his Endowment.

The builder of the planet upreared vast mountain ranges, upon whose shoulders the continents repose. Here and there some lofty cone towers above the wilderness of pine and granite, in such majestic grandeur, that its outlines can only be measured from an extended perspective. Nations crystalize about great men. In some crisis, a man arises, the magnitude of whose accomplishment and the grandeur of whose character, can only be measured from the standpoint of universal history. Only as we comprehend the stupendous drama of which he was the guiding genius and inspiration, can we appreciate his personal gifts and the service he wrought for the world. Such a man was Abraham Lincoln. He not only served his nation but the cause of civilization and mankind.

A rational philosophy of history is based upon the conception of an intelligent plan underlying the growth of society and the development of the race.

All the phenomena of history are the exhibits of an evolution from lower to higher forms. The rise and fall of empires contribute to progress. Out of the crucibles in which nations have been reduced to ashes some residuum comes to fertilize and enrich the future. Through the ages with their shifting scenes of action and reaction, runs a definite purpose. Society reaches toward its climax. Civilization is impatient of the existing conditions of ignorance, disorder and injustice. Far off, though it may be, the trend of historic forces, is toward universal self-government, luminous with wisdom, founded in righteousness and administered in a spirit of love. Only as we recognize this stream of tendency which leads to the

"One far off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves,"

can we appreciate the genius and service of him who for a time may have directed its forces.

The problem of modern civilization is the maintainance of democracy or self-government among groups of men in the harmony

of a federal system. Abraham Lincoln's crowning service was the solution of this problem. What then is the principle, its history and his connection with it?

The individual is best governed who governs himself in righteousness. The state is best governed which is self-governed in justice. Such government is freedom regulated by law. The law which limits; protects freedom. For ages, war has been the common condition of mankind. The military type of civilization has prevailed. Tribal organizations, states, kingdoms, empires have ever held themselves ready for conflict. Though in some nations great men have arisen who were men of genius in art, literature and politics, none ever learned how to hold self-governing groups together as a whole. The political experiments of the states of Greece, brilliant as their partial civilization was, were failures in federation, both from their inherent incapacity for self-government, and from pressure from without.

The Roman Empire consolidated many provinces with an apparent success, but it was a central government at the expense of self-government in the provinces. It was centralization at the cost of local freedom. The central government was a close corporation, which did everything in its own interest. When the temple of Janus was closed, "Pax-Romana" meant repression or absorption and the destruction of local liberty. The ecclesiastical authority which in an unholy partnership with the civil power sought the control of the European States during the middle ages adopted the policy of the Empire and everywhere repressed both civil and religious freedom.

The government of diverse groups by representation and combined in a central government with a written constitution, was the invention of the English-speaking people. Their insular position, protecting them from the interference of contiguous nations, while they made their political experiments, made it possible. But the law of evolution demanded a stage commensurate with the magnitude of the problem. It was provided. America was discovered. Spain with her incapacity to conceive of self-government much less establish self-governing colonies sank with her "invincible armada," and ceased to be a menace to civilization. France with despotic theories of government was driven from the new world by the victory of Wolfe before Quebec. This was most significant event of the 18th century. It was followed by great historic results. A virgin territory of vast extent was secured for the use of a people, who alone thus far in history, had shown a capacity for self-government. A vast ocean lay like a moat about the land, so that people jealous of new ideas and not in sympa-

thy with free forms of government, could not interfere. A few savages only were to be brushed away from the advancing frontier. A fertile soil and bountiful harvests, with peace, gave the people leisure for the study of the art of government and experiments with this principle.

The war with mother country was unlike the war which ended with the victory of Wolfe, (a war of two people, with antagonistic ideas,) it was a war sustained by a part of the English people in behalf of principles time has shown to be equally dear to all. It left the people absolutely free to try the experiment of Federal Government. This principle is that states have exclusive jurisdiction in their local affairs, while upon the questions of common concern between groups of states, decisions shall be reached by the legislation of the central government represented by states and by the whole people. It is only by this principle, that it is possible to hold together groups of men spread over vast areas with diverse local interests, in orderly and peaceful relations without a sacrifice of their freedom. The adoption of this principle and the working of it into the constitution of the government was the most perfect piece of constructive statesmanship the world ever saw. Gladstone well might say, "the American Constitution is as far as I can see the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man."

As it was the task of the fathers of the republic to inaugurate this principle, it became the work of <sup>President</sup> Lincoln to carry it through a crucial and exhaustive test.

He could not have had a grander opportunity or a more conspicuous theater of action. It would seem that the institution of slavery was introduced into this country by Providence so that the federal principle might be subjected to a supreme trial. Only such an interest could ever have inspired eleven states with a supreme devotion to the heresy of "States Rights." This enlisted their pride of patriotism and the consecration of their religion. For this they organized their entire military power as a unit. For this they organized all the moral and physical power of caste prejudice intensified by the strongest possible contrasts of color and physical feature deepened by the intellectual and moral debasement of centuries of barbarism.

These states had been governed by men who for long years had a definite and determined policy of nationalizing slavery with secession and the overthrow of the federal principle as the alternative. They held close economic relations to England and hoped for her naval support. Even among his closest advisers, there were those who were in

*They hoped for aid from Louis Napoleon.  
They counted upon a divided North.*

doubt about the right of coercion of a state by the central government. It was somewhat of a problem whether the great mass of the people would fight for the principle. There never was a greater problem or a severer task. Yet Mr. Lincoln organized the moral and material resources of the country beyond all the precedents of history and achieved an absolute victory.

Many ardent haters of slavery were impatient with him because he put the maintainance of the Union first. Time has shown his deeper wisdom. The destruction of slavery was incidental. He knew that if the Union was preserved with the principle of local self-government, emancipation would be the sure result. Emancipation was a priceless blessing. But more vitally interwoven into the very fiber of the national life was this principle of Union with local independence. Would it be overthrown by the first serious social problem it had to meet, or would it be an example of a successful experiment in self-government to other ages and all lands?

If the adoption of this principle is essential to freedom, peace and the highest civilization, then the war terrible as it was, was worth to the nation and the world, the blood and treasure of generations. Mr. Lincoln so believed. He believed that victory so purchased, would be the earnest of the future peace and freedom of mankind. As expressive of his theory of the war, and of his belief that this principle was the issue, what more conclusive than his own words of matchless eloquence on the battle field of Gettysburg;


"It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

In his letter to Mr. Greeley he said: "My paramount object is to save the Union and not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it. If I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. I intend no modification of my oft expressed personal wish that all men everywhere might be free."

The victory of this principle in its supreme test, marks an epoch in history. As the ages recede, it will be more and more sharply defined. And he who guided its progress and made it triumphant, will be the man of the epoch.

When there is to be a marked movement of progress, Providence always raises a man for the task. Such an one was the Semitic genius





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2. He had a sound mind in a sound body. He had lived a pure and normal life and rare physical vigor, the "wrestling thens that thro' the world."

He could express his thought in a style clear as crystal and full of profound feeling. He had studied the prophets of the golden age of Hebrew history and ~~had~~ felt the inspiration of Shakespeare.



who came up out of the swamps of the Nile, to organize a swarm of slaves into a nation. Such was Socrates; out of his poverty enriching the world as the father of intellectual life. Such was the carpenter's Son; who established the spiritual republic of God, with liberty and love as its law. Such was Luther; who broke the shackles which despotism forged for the human intellect. Such was Shakespeare; who translated the world's wisdom into matchless song and filled it with music. Such was Washington; who organized peasants into armies and won the victories of progress and of peace. Such was Lincoln; solving the profoundest problem of civilization and touching with the heaven of peace and freedom the life of the race. For I do not doubt that as self-government in righteousness is the highest law of the individual life, so self-government in justice, among the nations, is the highest law of national life. Evolution working by this principle and under the Divine direction, justifies the expectation that the nations of the earth will yet disband their armies and abandon the military for the industrial type of civilization. Disputes will not be settled by war. The wage of battle will be as obsolete between nations as between individuals. International questions will be settled by federal tribunals. Their decisions will be sustained by the public opinion of the world.

All possible groups of men developed to the self-governing grade, will combine under federal systems and attain the largest possible life. The wonderful weapons of modern warfare, the immense structures of military art on land and sea, will be gazed on with wonder as the monuments of a civilization long passed away. As history develops along this line towards this consummation; above the levels of common humanity, across the intervening distances of history, the service and fame of Lincoln, will stand out in glorious majesty as the mountain stands out from the interminable forests, its grand lines clearly defined and its sublime peak, by day, bright with the splendor of the sun; at night, crowned with the stars!

Emerson says, that when the Architect of the Universe has points to carry in his government he expresses himself in the structure of minds.

I shall briefly allude to Mr. Lincoln's personal endowments.

He had the power of seeing truth with the clearness of absolute vision. He saw principles in their profoundest and largest relations. As the eye is made for light, his mind was made to comprehend truth. Truth was to him

"A thing of beauty and a joy forever."

In his earliest intellectual awakening, the theorems of Euclid were his favorite study. The mental exercise of solving these by original solution, was to him a sort of creative ecstasy. I saw him once when the simple statement of a scientific truth new to him, kindled him with child-like enthusiasm, which flashed in his eye and suffused his face with a radiant glow. His humor was the relief which comes in waving and undulatory lines to a mind which first sees things with absolute directness, on "the shortest line between two points." He relished stories because they were diagrams which pictorially illustrated truth. To him all visible things were language. He saw through things to principles. When the politician wove his sophistries and delusions to tangle the public mind for the sake of cheap and temporary results, he cut through to the fundamental principle. So he showed the difference between a politician and statesman. As a bee guided by divine instinct over all the fields, gathers its treasure; so he, amid all the illusions, confusions, sophistries, passionate enthusiasms, party cries and tangling subtleties could ever discern the truth. A lie or a sophism was revolting to his soul. The spirit of truth led him upward to the loftiest elevation and clearest atmosphere of intellectual life, as in Dante's great poem, the poet is led by the gentle and sainted Beatrice, who comes from heaven to be his help; and through all the ascents of paradise, interprets for him all truth and leads him from star to star.

He had also the prophetic quality of mind. The logical and prophetic gift are closely associated, if not one. The intellect which sees truth in its absolute relations sees equally its logical applications, hence it sees not only its relations to the present, but to the future. Like Moses, Mahomet, and others, he had the prophetic preparation. Great heroes come out of the wilderness to society; not out of universities. The loftiest peak, rests on invisible pillars in the common earth. Genius comes from the common people. Epochal heroes come from the life of the shepherd and the frontiersman. Face to face with themselves and with God in nature, they learn the heart of God and the heart of man, and can speak from one to the other. In solitude, great souls are visited with great thoughts and become conscious of a mission to men. As the Hebrew came down from the mountain, his face luminous with the reflected light of the mysterious theophany he had witnessed; Lincoln came from the rude wilds of the Sangamon, with the light of a divine vision in his soul. He had met face to face, the triune theophany of eternal *truth, justice and love*. Henceforth, his life was under the spell of a sublime consecration. Henceforth, he felt the sovereignty

of conscience. Right and wrong rose up in his mind in sharp and eternal contrast. Without any subtleties of philosophy he appealed to the moral sense and the common sense of the people, assailing wrong with a terrible earnestness. He seemed to have no personal ends. Fortune, honor, fame, was nothing. Truth, right, justice, was everything. And so when his greatest task began, he seemed only to seek to establish in the hearts of the people a love for the federal union with all its implications of justice and liberty. His grasp of the real issue, his prophetic vision of results, his lucid analysis, his axiomatic statement, his elevation of thought, the overmastering energy of his large and magnetic nature, gathered men about him as a leader. He loved men as men. No splendor of position, advantage of relation, persistence or plausibility of claim, could blind him to absolute justice. His insight pierced to the heart of things and men. The hearts of men were his books. Events were his instructors. To the mass of men, the stars are stars and nothing more. Kepler climbed the ladder of their rays and read their secret, the law of their life and motion. To Lincoln, men were not mere units and nothing more, but personal centers of thought, passion, joy, hope, aspiration and despair, and he entered into sympathy with them. His heart was timed to beat with the heart of mankind, and so he lived and thought and wrought for man as man. Like a bugle blast sounding a charge, was his utterance on the eve of the war. Uttered at this Capitol, they make it seem as Holy Ground. "The doctrine of self-government is right, absolutely and eternally right. When the white man governs himself, that is self-government, but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self-government, that is despotism."

"Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man's nature, opposition to it in his love of justice. These principles are in eternal antagonism. I object to it, the (Nebraska Law) because it assumes this, that there can be moral right in the enslavement of one man by another. I object to it as a dangerous dalliance for a free people a sad evidence that feeling prosperity we forget right, that liberty as a principle we have ceased to revere."

"Our republican robe is soiled and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it, let us turn and wash it white in the spirit if not in the blood of the revolution. Let us turn slavery from its claims of moral right back upon its existing legal rights and its arguments of necessity. Let us re-adopt the Declaration of Independence and practices and policies which harmonize with it. If we do this we shall not only save the Union but we shall have so saved it as to make and keep it forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it that the succeeding millions of free happy people the world over shall rise up and call us blessed to the latest generations.

These words will be wisdom and music while the ages come and go. Like diamonds gathered in the fields of thought by the thinker from the wilderness, polished to exquisite perfection by the touch of his genius, they will shine and sparkle in the diadem of his fame forever.

Mr. Lincoln had the gift of wisdom. Men may have much knowledge but no wisdom. He had the highest genius for statesmanship,—common sense. It was this common sense which in the Babel of many voices, the fury and confusion of war, could ever detect the “still small voice” of wisdom. He saw as a fundamental principle that a policy to succeed must have the support of public opinion. It was this common sense which beyond other gifts, helped him to solve the problem. He had to direct the unwise zeal of friends and the jealousy of rivals, the treason of covert enemies, and schemes of foreign nations, while he encountered the most persistent and powerfully organized military force of all time. He had to harmonise all varieties of opinion, love for the Union, hatred for slavery. He had to repress anti-slavery zeal. He had to yield doubtful points and gain the advantages of compromise without concessions of principle. He comprehended the temper and prejudices of the people, and led them while he seemed to follow. To the over-zealous, he seemed slow. To the conservative, rash. Those who thought only of emancipation, feared at times, that he was disloyal to liberty. He knew that premature action in the direction of emancipation, would cripple his armies. A logical result of the struggle, he knew it could abide its time. The exquisite delicacy of adjustment of his policy to the development of public sentiment, under the stern tutelage of war, will ever challenge the admiration of mankind. He followed it, yet he led it. He restrained it, yet he nourished it. He curbed it, yet he crowned it. A relation to which we may apply the simile of the poet.

“As unto the bow the cord is,  
So unto man is woman.  
Though she bends him, she obeys him?  
Though she draws him, yet she follows.”

He was in the largest sense a religious man. Loyalty to the law of rectitude and love is the consummate and perfect flower of religion. He sought absolute harmony with his environment. Not that he accepted as a complete explanation of life, the tenets of any sect, but he had that absolute loyalty to the Highest which transcends creeds and forms.

“Our little systems have their day,  
They have their day and cease to be.”

He walked with God. He was so much larger than other men, that in his highest moods he needed God for a companion. All the world's



greatest men have had a reverent spirit and believed that the Supreme mind worked and spake through them. Lincoln felt with reverent awe that he was an instrument of the divine purpose. So absolute was his loyalty, that the perfection and strength of his action, was one with the lift of the tides and the roll of the world. Under his grand life, was ever the solid earth; over it, the arch of the infinite heaven. He stood firmly on the one; he looked steadfastly into the other. When deputations of good men representing their orders or sects, presented to him their measures of duty and their standards of action, he listened; but all the while, at the other end of the line, he was in converse with God as his chosen son, and from whom, in the confidence of mutual trust, he received his commissions. What finer scorn and fiery moral anger than his at the slightest hint of unfaith. "There have been men base enough to propose to me to return to slavery our black warriors of Port Hudson and Olustee, and thus win the respect of the masters they fought. Should I do so, I would deserve to be damned in time and eternity. Come what will, I will keep my faith with friend and foe."

It sometimes seems that Mr. Lincoln was not an actual character, but an incarnation ~~or embodiment~~ of the nation's spirit and life. If at any period during the war, the question had been asked, how does the loyal element of the nation feel? what does it seek? what is its spirit? the answer would have been found in his mind and heart. As the nation thought, he thought; and as it felt, he felt; he was timed to its spirit and in affinity with its inmost secret. The North was not warlike by nature, nor was he; it shrank from prosecuting the war, but it conscientiously persisted to the end; so did he. He was the key to the war. He moderated passion, and kept pity and humanity at the front. He was not rigid in discipline, for the army was fighting its own battles.

With charity for all and malice toward none he fought with his great heart brooding over the whole nation, and with tears of love and compassion for both sides. Civil wars are generally vindictive. He was tender hearted and had infinite patience. He looked upon all men in weakness or in wrong, with a pity, profound to the degree of melancholy.

Helen of Argo had such universal beauty that everybody felt related to her. There was significance in the popular expression, "Father Abraham." The nation felt for him filial affection. While the dutiful sons fought for the integrity of the home, it was only a question of time, when the foolish prodigals, their heritage wasted, would come to themselves and return.

With as strong an arm as ever struck for the right; with as clear an eye as ever took in this world; with as ~~keen an eye and~~ just a judgment as ever weighed human life; with as pure a heart as ever throbbed with human sympathy; he saved his nation, freed the slaves, established the principle on which alone the nations of the earth can dwell in peace and freedom, and so solved the problem of civilization.

26e The man by whose monument we stand has been lifted by his service and character up out of a single nation's homage and love belong to mankind. That granite will crumble. The beautiful and eloquent bronzes will vanish under the touch of time and change; but the beauty of his devotion, the grandeur of his service and the exaltation of his life will forever hold the heart of mankind and no shadow will ever dim the splendor of his fame.

(*caricature*)